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ABSTRACT

In this address to educational policy makers attending the National Forum on Excellence in Education, the United States Secretary of Education outlines his perceptions of the responsibilities of those responding to the challenge to renew and reform American education. Discussion focuses on the responsibilities of governors, state legislative leaders, governing boards and their administrators, teachers and teachers' organizations, higher education, parents and students, the private sector, and the Federal government. (RH)

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

THE SECRETARY

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY

T. H. BELL

U. S. SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

ON

# "LEADERSHIP FOR REFORM AND RENEWAL OF AMERICAN EDUCATION"

Given at

The National Forum on Excellence in Education

DECEMBER 6, 1983

INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

PS 014098



400 MARYLAND AVE., S.W. WASHINGTON, D.C. 20202

Thank you for responding to the invitation from the Department of Education to come here to participate in this National Forum on Excellence in Education. We decided to sponsor this forum and to invite you here because you represent the decision makers for American education. And as we move in a few more days to the year 1984, far-reaching decisions will be made that will decide the measure of success in what I perceive to be a nationwide movement to improve our schools.

In my entire career of 37 years of labor in the vineyards of American education, I have never seen such a great potential for our Republic to enhance learning and reach up to higher levels of excellence in education as that which exists right now. This is our finest opportunity in many decades and we must not fail to bring it to full fruition. Whether we do indeed succeed will largely be determined over the next six to eight months, and the outcome will largely depend on you.

The legislatures will soon convene in most of the State capitals. The Congress will convene again in January. The governors will present budgets and recommendations for massive reform in most of the States' school systems. The President will soon be before Congress with his State of the Union message and our budget proposals. By late summer of next year we will know what proposals have passed or are quite likely to pass. I predict that 1984 will see the dawn of a new era for American education.

All of us assembled here this evening should look upon our future responsibilities in much the same way as the "Peanuts" comic character, Linus, looked upon his fate when he said sadly that there was no greater burden in the world than to have a great potential. Well, right now we have the burden of a great potential. I invited you to come here to Indianapolis to participate in this National Forum on Excellence in Education so that we could deliberate together about the future potential of American education and share with each other our plans for action--and reform.

While I cannot assure that it will happen, we hope that this forum will result in all of you being better informed about what changes will be enacted by lawmakers and governing boards and their administrators who function as policymakers. We hope that the action and reforms that you take and make over the next few months will be better informed actions because you came here to listen and to contribute to the deliberations that will take place in this forum.

Tomorrow and Thursday, you will be in plenary sessions to listen to speakers, and you will follow these with workshop

discussion group sessions where ideas will be clarified, challenged, and modified. We will record all sessions and prepare a summary to be disseminated to decision makers. We will make available to you copies of speeches, copies of proposed legislation, copies of some laws that have been recently enacted, and issue papers for your review. In addition, we will ask you to write a summary of your views about local, State, and Federal responsibilities. These we will summarize and disseminate.

Since we enjoy today a very high level of support and concern from the public, from governors and lawmakers, from the press and the mass media, our ideas on how to improve and reform American education have an excellent chance of being implemented. Based upon polls that I have read and the conversations from the 12 regional forums that I attended across the Nation, I am convinced that there is an unprecedented readiness to support action to reform and renew American education.

The speakers in the plenary sessions and in the workshops will present ideas that you will like or dislike. Obviously, after you have listened and reflected you will be accepting and rejecting what is offered here. But you should leave here knowing more about what is going on in many States, and we hope that this will be helpful in your future deliberations about the type and scope of the reforms necessary to restore quality and excellence to American education.

In my presentation this evening, I am going to tell you what I think you should do and what actions should be taken. I will try to outline what I perceive to be the responsibilities of all of you who are decision makers.

Everyone in this audience is aware that ours is a vast, complex, diverse, multicultural nation served by a decentralized network of schools, colleges and universities that spend annually over $230 billion and that involve fully 30 percent of this huge country's population in educational endeavors either as students or employees. Change in such a system must come through persuasive attainment of consensus and it will not happen overnight. I do not despair at the prospects of attainment of broad areas of agreement because I have seen the potential formulation taking shape as we gather here tonight in this opening session of our national forum. I came from the 12 regional forums encouraged and optimistic about the dawning of a great new reform era for American education because I've heard the "makings" of agreement from Portland, Maine to Whittier, California and from Seattle, Washington to Athens, Georgia.

From the local, State and Federal levels and from teachers, school boards members, legislators, governors, college presidents, principals and superintendents, Members of Congress,

and Federal officials, we have been receiving encouraging letters and comments.

From all of this and from my own experiences and observations, I suggest the following as the responsibilities of governors, lawmakers, board members, administrators, teachers, parents, students, and representatives of higher education, the private sector, and the Federal Government.

If I could have my way, and wave a magic wand, what follows is a description of how we would all respond to the challenge to renew and reform American education.

1. Governors

As the chief executives of the States, the governors should aggressively push for the widely accepted reforms spelled out in the report of the National Commission and in other nationally recognized studies. Using the great power of his or her office, each governor should keep before the public, the legislature, and the governing boards and their administrators a reform agenda for renewal of education. Governors should press first for improvements that can be made that do not cost more money. Many of these are very important and can be immediately implemented. Governors should advocate additional financial support for education that is tied to a mandate for change. Change is always difficult, and governors must press for it as a condition for support of more funds. Governors should support increased funding that is structured in a manner that does not leave education as it is and merely makes it more expensive. Governors should press, for example, for the building of a truly great teaching profession. This means not only more competitive salaries, but career ladders that break with traditional lock step salary schedules. This means extensive reform in teacher education, teacher certification, and quality performance controls to assure that only highly literate scholars with proven ability to teach will be permitted to do so. Governors are making a great impact right now on the status of the teaching profession by pressing for increased salaries for teachers at the same time that they advocate change in how we devise and establish career ladders and promotion opportunities for teachers.

Governors should press for the needed curriculum reforms, increased standards, motivation and recognition to encourage students to perform at the outer limits of their abilities.

The Governor should place a high priority for adequate financial support of education--kindergarten through graduate school--so that the power and prestige of his or her high office is behind the legislature to see that schools and colleges are

well funded. But this support should always be conditioned upon performance accountability, efficiency, and aggressive leadership by governing boards and administrators to see that results are objectively measured so that the taxpayer will get a valuable return for the financial burden thus assumed.

Governors should reach out to highlight the best and most distinguished accomplishments in education on all levels. This will include recognitions and awards to outstanding teachers and students. All of this gubernatorial concern will constantly emphasize that excellence in education is not elitism. The governors can help meet this perception problem by emphasizing that excellence means outstanding performance on the part of a mentally retarded child as well as the academically gifted. Excellence will be found and recognized by governors as they visit the technical and vocational schools, the universities, and the inner city elementary schools. Governors should constantly press for scholarship and learning at all levels, and the power of the States' chief executives to highlight, encourage, and to motivate students and teachers should constantly be part of his or her leadership style. Governors can highlight issues and get front page or prime time attention to the pressing issues of educational reform. That is why emphasis by them is so important.

Advocacy for education is crucial and the chief advocate for excellence in education in every State should be the governor. A governor should recognize that education is the top priority of all the public and private endeavors in his or her State. I can't emphasize too much the significance and the critical need for our governors to continue to lead the Educational Reform Movement as they have been doing over the past few months. We have had great support, and it has made an enormous difference in our prospects for success. Many governors have put their political lives on the line for education and as we ask for their continued leadership, we must also thank them for the great job they have been doing and we must pray that they will be successful. There is no greater challenge facing our educational system than the revitalization at the local and state grass roots levels.

2. State Legislative Leaders

Most school districts and public higher education institutions are the creatures of the State legislatures. Each State has a statewide system of public education, and many States have statutes that relate to and encourage private education. Through legislative leadership at the State level, American education can attain a new era and a renewed prominence in the Nation's future. But this will not happen if the legislatures fail to take some new approaches that will lead to reform.

State legislative leaders will enact new laws carefully designed to reward excellence and discourage mediocrity on the part of students, teachers, administrators, governing boards, and institutions at all levels. The strategy of laws and appropriations should be keyed to the attainment of needed reforms. Lawmakers should draft legislation that wisely utilizes the power of the carrot and the stick (using the carrot heavily, and the stick sparingly) to attain urgently needed reforms in the educational world of each State.

Legislative leaders should, for example, see that the State's hard working, high performing teachers receive encouragement through the power of provisions in the appropriations acts. School districts with hard-to-educate populations need highly talented teachers and principals. We must enact laws that reward those who take on a tough job and do it well. The legislative power of the purse should reward the hard working, creative problem solvers. The legislature should recognize excellence. Rewarding slovenliness seems to beget more of the same. We have had too much legislation that rewards the worst at the same level as the best. Indeed, sometimes we even witness the best being penalized because of their diligence and the corrective actions they have taken. When we used to see this happen in my home State, my former colleague, David Gardner observed: "No good deed goes unpunished."

Each State legislature should enact laws to help strengthen the teaching profession. As a group, the State's teachers are the most important employees of all those paid out of coffers annually replenished by taxes. Legislative leaders should build into the statutes the framework within which governing boards, administrators, and teachers are provided incentives that can build a new system of recognition and reward that will attract into the State's teaching ranks, the finest minds with the highest potential for greatness in this, the highest calling and noblest work.

Legislative leaders should assign to governing boards the responsibility for attaining the levels of educational performance commensurate with the ideals and aspirations of the State. Legislative assignment of responsibility should, however, be accompanied by mandates that results be measured and reported back to those who must stand before the electorate and account for the taxes levied. The biggest challenge to lawmakers is to build into the statutes the needed incentives to lead education to new levels of excellence. The legislative leaders should recognize that delegation of responsibility without follow-up and accountability will not keep the healthy measure of creative tension necessary in any statewide system of education. The legislature should, as I see it, encourage more effort to measure results by rewarding, through appropriations

language, the accomplishments in education that they know the people want. When performance is measured, performance improves. When performance is measured and the results are fed back with rewards and recognition, the rate of improvement accelerates. Some of the Nation's most creative governors are preparing recommendations that will dramatically strengthen both recognition and reward systems in the teaching profession and in the student body. This will require a courageous response from legislative leaders.

I urge the legislative leaders to draft legislation that encourages school boards to govern the schools more aggressively. School boards will need this support to make changes. Governing boards on all levels (including higher education) will need the strength of new laws that are designed to meet problems such as: (1) declining graduation requirements and standards, (2) declining standardized test scores, (3) shortages of teachers in critical areas, (4) the loss of many of our bright and talented teachers, and (5) declining college entrance requirements. If we are to move from these conditions to newer and higher levels of excellence in education, it must be through effective leadership action by our State legislatures.

In short, we need a new and aggressive leadership push from our legislative leaders in all of our State capitals. Now, I recognize that we can't do it all with passing laws and mandating excellence by statute and we can't expect these needed reforms to happen overnight. Many changes must come by board and administrative action in close cooperation with teachers and parents. We do not need, for example, curriculum development on the floor of the House and the Senate. But we do urgently need a new framework of laws that rewards the best and discourages the worst in educational leadership and governance in all our institutions. This calls for aggressive leadership in the legislative halls of the Nation.

The laws passed in the 1984 legislative sessions will determine how effective our nationwide response will be to the almost unanimous mandate that we accomplish a sweeping reform and renewal of American education. I am fully confident that we will see this leadership displayed in the 1984 sessions of all our State legislatures. I have talked to a large number of State legislators over the past few months, and I am encouraged by their commitments and ideals.

3. Governing Boards and Their Administrators

After the governors and legislative leaders have carried out their responsibilities, the hard work and effective detailed implementation of reforms will rest with governing boards, superintendents, and principals.

The governing boards should implement legislative intent through written policies. These policies must concentrate more on the attainment of excellence in learning and excellence in teaching performance and less on routine administrative procedures. Many of our school boards spend too much time on budgets, buses, and boundaries and not enough on establishing through their administrators and teachers an effectively dynamic system of results-oriented leadership, rewards, incentives, and motivation that concentrates on carefully prioritized learning goals. It is encouraging to see the leadership and training activities sponsored by the National School Boards Association begin to help focus school based attention on teaching and learning outcomes.

Boards should ask their administrators to develop and present to them for review, revision, and approval a comprehensive set of policies that: (1) recognize outstanding teaching performance through a system of promotions up a career ladder accompanied by appropriate salary increases; (2) promote teacher in-service growth and improvement; (3) identify and weed out teachers who do not perform well and would therefore be happier in other work; (4) require student performance within limits of measurable standards; (5) reward and motivate students to reach the outer limits of their ability; (6) encourage public support and recognition of excellence in learning; (7) protect time on the task of learning at school by limiting activities that cut into the same; (8) require student mastery of a central core of very challenging academic subjects (such as the "new basics" recommended by the National Commission on Excellence in Education) that will produce highly literate, academically competent students; and (9) mardate the development of curricula that will motivate and challenge students on varying ability levels so that all may experience opportunity to reach the outer limits of learning capacity. If these reform mandates are not in the framework of school board policies they must be established by board action.

School leaders make the difference between ordinary and distinguished schools. In our effort to identify and honor over 150 outstanding secondary schools, we found that the school principal is the source of inspiration, high standards, tough but fair discipline codes being consistently enforced, and high

priority concern on the part of the faculty for coursework that stimulates and stretches the minds of students. School boards and their superintendents must act aggressively to evaluate, promote, reward, and replace school principals. It is hard if not impossible for a school to excel in spite of a mediocre or marginal principal. More leadership training, and constant encouragement and direction must be given to school principals. School boards and superintendents must devote more time and attention to leadership performance at the school level. In our aspirations for renewal of the Nation's schools, the principal is a key figure deserving of more attention.

In summary of my recommendations to school boards, I emphasize that more attention to teaching, student achievement, and curriculum content must come from those elected from the grass roots to govern our schools. Others are deciding what to teach, what to test, and when to promote.

The school board's most critical decision is the selection of the finest leader they can obtain as the superintendent of schools. If the board does not have a prime leader with ability to move the entire school system to meet high levels of excellence, the students, parents, and taxpayers will be cheated. School boards have a heavy responsibility to support fully or remove promptly the superintendent of schools. How the teachers, principals, students, and parents all rally around the board's leadership will largely depend on the performance of the superintendent who must transform policies of the board into action and measurable results.

State boards of education and the chief State school officers have a very profound responsibility in the governance and adminstration of education. The legislative reform advocated by governors and enacted by State legislators must be implemented by State education agencies under the policy direction and administrative leadership of a State commissioner or State superintendent of education.

Traditionally, many standards are set by State boards under the leadership activity of the Chief State School Officer (CSSO). Much can be done on the State education agency (SEA) level to help both the legislative leaders and the local school boards to perform their roles. Teacher certification standards need to be reviewed with a renewed critical scrutiny. Statewide high school graduation requirements, standardized testing, competency standards, and many other actions taken by SEAs and State boards will spell the difference between success and failure in the immediate future. We need State level actions that respond to the many studies recently released. Most of the Nation's chief State school officers and State boards of education have been actively revising standards for education,

testing and measurements, and standards of excellence. We need to maintain this momentum. Some very significant moves are under way.

The Nation's school boards on the local and State levels must govern more aggressively. They must become more activist in their behavior, and they must respond to the outstanding leadership that we all hope to see displayed by governors and legislative leaders. The response thus far from boards and administrators has been very encouraging. We have seen some very effective SEA and local school board leadership that has been active and timely over the past few months. The contrast among States is, however, quite remarkable, and we must see more response from some State level and local level boards to meet the challenge. Just as much is happening in many places, little is happening or shows prospects of happening in others. I hope this forum will help in an awakening where governing boards still need to respond.

4. Teachers and Teachers' Organizations

We cannot have great schools if we fail to build a truly great teaching profession. In order to do this, the teachers' organizations on the local, State, and national levels must join us as we take action to change teacher education, certification, promotion, and salary practices. Teachers must support the widely expressed view that we should supplement the traditional salary schedule with a career ladder system patterned after the academic rank system that has been in place in higher education for decades.

By the same token, we must assure teachers of a vital voice in this movement. Just as the faculty on the college campus has a large measure of the decision making on faculty promotion on the college campus, so should the teachers in our elementary and secondary schools be involved in a system of peer review and promotion. I believe that our senior and most able teachers deserve a similar recognition and compensation system as that now enjoyed on the college level. As I have said before, I would like to see the master teacher in our elementary and secondary schools become the equivalent of the full professor on the college and university level.

We need effective assistance from our teachers to help us in legislative action and board policy adoption to implement these reforms. We need the talents of our teachers in improving teacher education, teacher certification, and needed curriculum reform and upgrading of standards.

We should all try to understand more fully the frustration and stress of being a teacher in today's schools. And we should recognize that teachers are wary about changes that touch their lives. But teachers need to realize that we urgently need some reforms and we need their help to make these reforms stick.

The landmark legislation enacted in California and Florida--as well as that now being drafted in a number of other States--need the support of teacher organizations. I am encouraged by the response of many teachers. Their reluctance to embrace these changes is understandable. But if teachers will become involved and help to shape the changes by giving us the benefit of their experience they will be the ones to gain from the reforms.

5. Higher Education

Higher education must play a key role in strengthening the quality of schools. Action on the part of colleges and universities should include: (1) upgraded admission requirements to help strengthen the high school; (2) more rigorous teacher education programs accompanied by aggressive recruitment and an institution-wide commitment to high quality teacher education; and (3) technical assistance and sharing of experience and expertise in establishing peer review and faculty promotion procedures in our elementary and secondary schools.

The Nation's colleges and universities can make a very significant contribution to our drive to enhance excellence in our schools. I have had numerous expressions of willingness to help on the part of college and university presidents. The encouraging thing is that many of our most prestigious universities are offering to help.

We are now witnessing the development of a closer working relationship among our schools and colleges and their professionals.

6. Parents and Students

The prime assignment to parents and their children must emphasize building attitudes and commitments. Many students come to school each day from a troubled and chaotic home. Many come from homes where learning is not respected and where homework is difficult or impossible.

A significant contribution from parents would come if a new policy emerged in each home to add to the typical six period secondary school day a regular seventh period of intense, high quality study at home. Parents must participate actively in the education of their children. This will nurture confidence, creativity, and esteem for scholarly accomplishment. This could be achieved with high quality learning time set aside and required of each student.

In the final analysis, learning is based on the initiative, attitude, and receptiveness of each individual student. No school can fully compensate for failure in the home. Much of our failure in education can be traced back to broken homes, indifferent parents, and the undercutting of school authorities.

Parents must be active in school affairs, in school board elections, and in the financial affairs of the school system. Legislators, school board members, and teachers should all feel the support from the neighborhoods where school and home interests come together. As school principals and teachers set tough, no nonsense behavior codes, parents must rally around with their support.

The best heritage parents can leave their children is a good education. This can only be done through working with others to make our grass roots, decentralized system work. We need to learn more about how to get parents more effectively committed to the education of their children. This may be the most difficult of all our problems. The answer may also be the key to success.

8. The Private Sector

Private schools make a very significant contribution to American education on the elementary, secondary, and higher education levels. What has been said throughout these remarks applies to private as well as public institutions. They, too, have problems and shortcomings and need for reform. Private schools do a great amount of public good in our society.

Many private companies and corporations have been "adopting" schools as means of lending assistance with adjunct teachers, tutors, etc. We have received valuable assistance in many other ways, especially in the widespread acceptance of the President's challenge to increase Partnerships In Education to encompass all schools.

Over the next few months we will need the political, moral, and financial support of the private sector. The Nation's productivity will depend upon skilled intelligence just as our system of government must have enlightened, highly literate, critical thinking citizens. Business needs well-educated employees and prosperous consumers. Thus, we will need the support of foundations, corporations, chambers of commerce and civic clubs if we are to realize our aspirations for a genuine renaissance in American education.

9. The Federal Government

What should be the assignment of the Federal Government in this massive effort to renew and reform our schools? This is surely one of the most controversial of all questions. The answers I have heard at the 12 regional forums range all the way from none--no responsibility whatever--to a very large and

extensive role of financing schools, setting standards, and directing the educational affairs of the Nation.

My position is somewhat in the middle of these two positions. We are in the midst of our discussions and reviews of priorities and budget levels. I am constantly pressed on this, but this must wait for the State of the Union message from the President and the release of our budget proposals by the Office of Management and Budget.

I have heard many critics complain that our Federal commitment is all rhetoric and little more. Other critics have said cynically that the worst thing that could happen to our schools would be for the Federal Government to try to help them. I am confident that when you have heard us out you may not agree on all the points, but I am hopeful you will not be disappointed.

Conclusion

We appreciate your attendance at this forum. I hope that my somewhat lengthy discourse will stimulate discussion in the sessions tomorrow and Thursday. May you all feel free to speak out on the issues. Your views will enrich the diversity and intensity of our deliberations.

There is an old Chinese proverb which says that "The longest journey begins with the first step." Let history record that we who gathered here in Indianapolis (6-8 Dec. 1983) took the primary and essential first steps leading to significant actions and fundamental reforms throughout American education--reforms which ushered in a new era of quality and excellence for American education before this century was over.

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